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Indonesia: Papua “torture video” demands independent investigation

The Indonesian government should initiate an independent investigation into reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Papua over the last two years, Amnesty International said today.

A video published online last week shows Papuans being kicked and physically abused, in some instances by men in uniform.

“The release of this video is the latest reminder that torture and other ill-treatment in Indonesia often go unchecked and unpunished,” said Donna Guest, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

“We continue to receive regular reports about torture by members of the security forces. However, there are often no independent investigations, and those responsible are rarely brought to account before an independent court.”

Another recent police video obtained by human rights groups showed Yawan Wayeni, a Papuan political activist, with severe abdominal injuries receiving no assistance from police officials just before his death.

Yawan Waveni had reportedly been arrested by members of the Police Mobile Brigade in August 2009 at his house in Yapen Island, Papua.

Amnesty International urges the Indonesian government to appoint the National Human Rights Commission to lead the investigation.

The government should also ensure the security of the members of the commission carrying out the investigation, as well as the security of victims, witnesses and their families.

Amnesty International called on the Indonesian government to publicize findings and make them accessible, whenever relevant, to victims and their families.

“The authorities must send a clear public message to all members of the security forces in Indonesia, especially in Papua, that torture and other ill-treatment is strictly prohibited at all times and, if it occurs, full criminal investigations will begin,” said Donna Guest.

In December 2009, Amnesty International wrote to the National Head of Police to provide details about a pattern of police abuse in Nabire, Papua.

Between December 2008 and April 2009, police officials used unnecessary and excessive force against demonstrators, injuring at least 21 people there. Police also repeatedly beat and otherwise ill-treated at least 17 people during and after arrests between January and April 2009.

Amnesty International also received credible information on two cases of unlawful killings by security

forces in Papua during April and June 2009.

To date, Amnesty International has still not received a written response to this letter, and is unaware of any independent and impartial investigation into these reports.

Background

As a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), Indonesia is legally bound to prohibit torture and other ill-treatment in all circumstances. The National Constitution and the 1999 Human Rights Act also prohibit torture. However, Indonesia's Criminal Code has yet to incorporate a definition of torture that is in line with the UNCAT, and with clear sanctions.

Amnesty International recognizes that there is a low level insurgency in Papua and the obligation, and responsibility, of the Indonesian government to protect its citizens.

However there is an absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment under international law.